

**Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee
January 18, 2011 Minutes**

Attendance:

David Weitzer, Chuck Schuster, Robert Beall, Tim McGrath, Jane Evans, Gene Walker, David Heisler, Patrick Brown

Criss said the Drew Stabler, Eddie Kuhlman, and Lois Stoner could not attend the meeting tonight

Guests:

Wade Butler, Jane Seigler, Vince Berg

Staff:

Callum Murray, Jeremy Criss

Meeting came to order at 7:45 pm

Introductions: Not necessary

Minutes from the November 6, 2010 meeting:

Criss asked if there were any changes or corrections needed to the AAC minutes from November 16, 2010. Hearing none, Tim McGrath motioned to approve the minutes, Jane Evans seconded, and the minutes were approved as written. *Please note the AAC did not meet in December 2010.*

Update on the FY 2011-2012 Budget for DED-Agricultural Services:

Everyone turned to Attachment B which outlined the Budget Reduction Strategy for the Agricultural Services Division to reduce the general funds allocation by 15 % and back fill these reductions totaling \$95,000 with alternative public and private funding. Criss said the Montgomery County Farm Bureau has agreed starting in FY 2012 to contribute \$21,000 and the Montgomery Soil Conservation District will contribute \$20,000. The County Executive met with leaders of the agricultural community on December 2, 2010 and he stated the budget reduction strategy was creative and innovative and he recommended that DED move forward on the administrative process to execute Memorandums of Understanding between the MCFB, MSCD, and the DED regarding the private funds that will be used to back fill the general funds. The strategy also involves moving forward to fill the vacant Principle Administrative Aide position that is currently vacant and assigned to the University of Maryland Extension office in the County. This outcome will help to address the agreement between the County Government and the UME that requires the County to provide 2 administrative staff positions to the UME. Currently the County is not providing any administrative staff to the UME. Callum

reported that the MNCPPC has reduced the Community Planning Division by 20 % and that 7 Divisions are now reduced to only 3.

Update on MC 8-11 Leghold and Body Gripping Traps Prohibition:

The proposed bill will prohibit these traps being used in Montgomery County unless the DNR qualifies farmers or their agents to use them to manage wildlife on their farms. This legislation did not pass the 2010 Maryland session and everyone agreed that farmers need to tools necessary to manage ground hogs, foxes, beaver and other wildlife that threatens property and livestock. There was discussion surrounding a cat that was killed in a trap in Mount Airy and the concern this would have on the passage of the bill.

Zoning Rewrite Process:

Everyone turned to the draft report on the Zoning Rewrite Process that was presented to the Planning Board on December 14, 2010. Jane Seigler said she was concerned regarding the section on equestrian facilities that does not include the important changes to the zoning regulations from 2004. Jane said the Equestrian facility standards have been reduced extensively. Callum explained that AC zone is equivalent to the RDT zone and that AR is equivalent to the Rural and Rural Cluster zone. Callum also said that P is equivalent to permit by right, C is equivalent to special exception, and L is limited by specific standards as noted. Criss said that the legislative intent sections in the RDT zone serve as the County's right to farm law and it is important that the new zoning code includes this section. Callum said that Fair Fax County VA has a much larger zoning code than Montgomery County. It was stated that the devil is always in the details and if the zoning code is going to be reduced extensively the details that are crucial will be lost. There is a Zoning Advisory Panel of land use attorneys that are working with the MNCPPC staff on this project. It was suggested that at some point a presentation to the agricultural community on the sections pertaining to agricultural zones would be helpful. Jane Evans asked how the new zoning code would grandfather existing uses and businesses. Vince said that many uses would need to be considered non-conforming uses once the zoning code is updated. After additional discuss the following folks volunteered to be on an AAC subcommittee on this zoning rewrite project: Vince Berg, Tim McGrath, Jane Seigler, and Jane Evans. It was agreed this project will take several years to complete and that in this current economic environment we have many other things that we should be spending public dollars on.

Follow Up on the Sustainable Food Community Meeting:

Approximately 85 people attended this event and there was strong support for the proposed Farm Incubator project. Jane Evans said there was a good focus at the meeting and the different views of the definition of what sustainable means. Jane thought the organic food system that is being promoted for the agricultural reserve does not include the large table food producers like Butlers, Homestead Farms, and Lewis Orchard. Jane Seigler suggested that the folks that are promoting organic production need to visit Butlers and the other folks and see for themselves how they are producing table food

crops. David Heisler felt the report could have been written in 10 pages as compared to over 100 pages long. David suggested that we need more dialog between down county folks and the agricultural community so they can better understand basic food production. Chuck explained in the 1970's that one farmer would produce enough food to feed 58 people and today the figure is much higher due to increased efficiency in agricultural production. Chuck also said that when he digs down into the field that is in no-till he has found a large population of earth worms. Wade said that many of these people need more education to understand that total food they consume is much greater than the capacity for local food production. Wade Butler and Jeremy Criss spoke with Royce Hanson at the end of the meeting and Royce said the Parks Foundation may be one way to fund the farm incubator. Tim McGrath said that David Scott would lose many acres if the farm incubator is located on the Darby Hub-Woodstock Park.

Update on the Closing of Poole's Store:

Criss referenced the announcement for the January 29, 2011 Open House and Public meeting on the Poole's Store. The AAC was involved 10 years ago to help Raymond Poole obtain a new lease with the MNCPPC to rent the store, the out buildings, and the house on the property. The AAC letter dated December 20, 2010 was presented to park representatives along with many other letters from the community. Everyone was encouraged to attend the open house the public meeting to learn more about the future plans of the MNCPPC.

Update on the Deer Donation Program:

The program has donated 385 deer through 2010 and the program usually ends in March. The private funding provided from the MCFB and GIA of MC will help to keep the program going given that Montgomery county funding under the contract is almost gone. Robert Beall explained about a deer donation program that has donated over 500 deer and that the deer hides not the meat are sold and he saw two very large stacks of separately graded deer hides for sale. Gene Walker suggested that we need to reach out to the insurance companies to see if they can help with funding the program as each deer donated reduces the potential for deer vehicle collision. Criss explained that the MCFB has contacted their Nation Wide agent for this very reason and that they are waiting for a response.

Proposed ZTA 10-15 Airstrips-Agricultural Zones:

Criss reviewed that background surrounding how the ZTA was proposed regarding a special exception pending before the Board of Appeals Hearing Examiner. The property is located on Peach Tree Road and the adjacent neighbors are concerned about the impact the airstrip will have on their property values and the impact on their livestock-horses. Callum said that the County's noise ordinance may also be an issue. David Heisler said there are power lines located near this property and that the use is recreational. Wade said that pilots must be safe and know what they are doing. A question was raised as to how much land is needed for an airstrip? The FFA has standards that all airstrips and

airfields must meet and they will need to be evaluated. Criss said that he is not aware of any special exception cases the RDT zone for airstrips. The Public Hearing on the ZTA 10-15 was scheduled with the Council earlier in the day and that AAC will need to forward their recommendations. Vince Berg said that Nancy Floreen asked for the recommendations of the AAC today. There was extensive discussion surrounding the dual purpose and mission of the 1980 Ag Reserve master plan of preserving agricultural and rural open space for recreational opportunities. The way the ZTA is currently written is problematic and it is a mistake and the footnote is not fair. Hearing no additional discussion, Robert Beall motioned for Criss to work with David Weitzer to prepare a letter from the AAC to the County Council on the ZTA 10-15 and Gene Walker seconded the motion and it passed.

Status of new Appointments to the AAC:

The interview for new candidates is scheduled for tomorrow January 19, 2011 and the interview committee is George Lechliden, Wade Butler, Chuck Schuster, John Z and Jeremy. The recommendations from the committee will be submitted to the County Executive.

Annual Meeting between the AAC/APAB and the County Executive:

This meeting is scheduled for February 10, 2011 and the following folks will be attending on behalf of the groups- David Weitzer and Criss for the AAC and Billy Willard and John Z for the APAB. The meeting format has been changed for this year and it will be conducted like a town meeting.

Update from Chuck Schuster UME Director:

Chuck said he is working with Jeremy to fill the PAA position assigned to UME and that he is hopeful it will be filled soon. Chuck said that he is having some challenges with the MNCPPC regarding the use of the AHFP for certain events and activities. There is a new employee in charge of scheduling and reserving space and the MNCPPC is promoting more rentals from outside groups to raise funding to cover costs. Chuck said a meeting between the farmers and the park folks may be needed to remind them of the main purpose of the agricultural activities center.

Schedule of AAC meetings for 2011:

Criss discussed the schedule of AAC meetings for the 2011 year and he said the time shown on the schedule for 7:00 pm only pertains to the room reservation. The time of 7:00 pm helps to make sure the group meeting in the room B does not run late as our AAC meetings start at 7:30 pm.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:30 pm.